

# CHRISTMAS IN PICTURES AT NATIONAL GALLERY REVEAL HOW SAVIOUR IS COMMEMORATED HERE

## HOLY FAMILY TREASURED IN WORKS OF ART

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM SHINES ON THESE CANVASES

There Are "Madonnas," Nearly a Dozen, Originals and Copies of Famous Artists; "The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin," Scenes in the Life of Our Lord, and Modern Symbolical Pictures Inspired by Tradition.

By Victor Flambeau

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"God rest you, merry gentlemen!  
Let nothing you dismay,  
For Christ the Lord, our Saviour,  
Was born on Christmas Day"

ON this new Christmas morn, in the year of our Lord, 1921, while joyful children are still counting their gifts, and the grown-ups are starting off to church, let us steal away together for a quiet visit at the National Gallery. Let us see how the Saviour of the World is commemorated in paintings, treasured for our delight.

Yes, there are genuine old masters in our National Gallery, pictures that connoisseurs have gathered and given to the people of the United States.

These works are yours and mine, so let us study our pictures with the enthusiasm of the collector, and the passion of the appreciator. But we should not feel satisfied until we have provided for them, through our Government, a suitable art gallery building worthy of their display, instead of leaving them badly lighted and crowded on the walls of a single section of the National Museum.

Here are "Madonnas," nearly a dozen, originals and copies of famous artists; representations of the "Holy Family," the "Visitation of the Blessed Virgin to St. Elizabeth," scenes in the life of our Lord, saints and angels, modern symbolical pictures inspired by tradition and interpreted through religious influences, like the Legend of the Holy Grail.

In the Harriet Lane Johnston room, a collection bequeathed to us by the niece of President Buchanan, let us observe the Luini "Madonna and Child," painted on wood and almost certainly an original. It is perhaps the loveliest Luini in the United States, and possibly the most beautiful "Madonna" on this side of the Atlantic. Its effect upon those who study it for the first time is often profound.

A young man, who viewed this large work with a group of students, had never before seen a Madonna picture, and he confessed afterward, "I could not forget it for weeks. I would wake in the night and see that beautiful mother and child as though in a vision. I never had studied pictures, having lived much of my life in lumber camps in the West, and I am unable to explain its tremendous impression upon me."

This should be the test of great art, its power to move the public mind rather than the hair-splitting critic's verdict, though we need both.

### PAINTED 400 YEARS AGO.

Our Luini "Madonna" was painted, no doubt, 400 years ago, for Bernardino Luini was born about 1475 and lived until about 1533. He was the most distinguished pupil of the great Leonardo da Vinci, and some critics, like Ruskin, have placed his work higher than that of Leonardo, but that is probably a bit extravagant.

Born at Luino, on the beautiful Lake Maggiore, Luini perhaps imbibed some of that poetic atmosphere of the Italian lake district, for his serene, happy, and contented mind is naturally expressed in the grace and beauty of his painting. In his faces there is always a floating, almost wistful smile.

The only anecdote preserved of Luini tells of his painting the figures of Saints in the Church at Saronno, Italy, and that for his rare work he received the pitiful equivalent of \$4.40 per day, along with wine, bread, and lodging, but this remuneration so well satisfied him that, in completing the commission, he painted a "Nativity" for nothing!

We have, alas, none of that very early painting of the Italian Renaissance in our National Gallery, though many of those "Primitives" may be found in our Walters Collection in Baltimore. But we have here in Washington several Madonna pictures of a

little later date, all of them worthy of study.

The Raphael "Holy Family," picturing the Blessed Virgin and Child, with St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth and St. John, is a marvelous composition, and if we did not know that the original is in the Munich Gallery in Germany, we might be tempted to believe ours to be an original, instead of an early and very fine copy, as it undoubtedly is, and painted on canvas, not wood.

### LOANED TO GALLERY.

This picture is lent to the National Gallery by a kind friend in Baltimore. It resembles in style Raphael's very famous Holy Family called "La Belle Jardiniere" (The Lovely Gardener) in the Louvre, and undoubtedly belongs to the same time, during the last of Raphael's stay in Florence.

Raphael was chief of all painters of the Blessed Virgin, and more than fifty of his Madonnas are deemed worthy of study, though it is possible that some of them were the work of his students or contemporaries, as he died at only thirty-seven, in the height of his fame.

In our collection there is a smaller "Madonna and Child," attributed somewhat doubtfully to Raphael as a genuine original, lent us by Thomas B. O'Sullivan. The texture of the painting is very smooth and it is undoubtedly an old, old picture, and may be a Raphael. The Madonna is holding the child in her arms, and an interesting detail is the fact that the child's drapery in this picture was added later, to appease a too sophisticated and more self-conscious age.

In our new Ralph Cross Johnson collection we find no fewer than five Madonnas. Earliest among these, possibly, is the charming picture of "The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria," by Giacomo Francia, leader of the Bolognese School. His dates are from 1486 to 1557. The infant Saviour is placing a ring upon the finger of the maiden Catherine, who has been found worthy to be his bride.

It is a mystical interpretation of a dream which the good Catherine had, after she had been baptized, and when she awoke, tradition says the ring was still on her finger! Catherine's father was a half brother to Constantine the Great, and she was a virgin and martyr to her father. She was naturally studious, and even as a child Plato was her favorite reading, but she renounced her intellectual learning that she might gain the wisdom of the spiritual life.

In this picture the expressions are all so sweet and gracious. Our lady is receiving St. Catherine as



THE panel at the top is one by Otto Walter Beck, and one needs no guide to be told that the subject portrays the Master's thought, "Suffer little children to come unto me." It is the gift of William T. Evans to the National Gallery of Art.

Right center—The Madonna and Child, by an unknown artist, after the famous Correggio.

Left center—The Virgin and Child, by Bernard Van Orley, a Flemish painter of the sixteenth century.

Below—The Holy Family, with St. Elizabeth, by Peter Paul Rubens, the Flemish painter of the sixteenth century whose touch has never been equaled.

a daughter; the Savior has a rapt and wondering look, while St. Joseph, pictured as an elderly man, shows tender gravity.

### TYPICAL PRIMITIVE STYLE.

Possibly we are wrong in saying that we have no Primitive here, for one, a circular composition of the Florentine School, by Sebastiano, dated 1513, the year of his death, representing the "Madonna and Child with St. John and an Angel," may be considered as rather typical of the Primitive style.

This picture is full of symbolism, as in the lily carried by the Angel, the Cross which forms a little St. John's staff, while the Mother is clothed in a robe of brilliant red with dark blue embroidered mantle. Supporting with one hand the infant Saviour, with the other she caresses the young St. John, six months younger than our Lord, while the Christ Child lifts his little hand in blessing.

"This picture," so a critic, Prof.

George B. Rose, of St. Louis, tells us, "is probably the original from which the larger and more pretentious work in the Louvre was evolved." Agreeable information, for original studies, like ours, are prized as often closer to the artist's real inspiration than the later result.

The circle, in which this work is composed, is a favorite form, as we observed at Trinity College art gallery, when studying the copy of Raphael's "Madonna della Sedia," and Botticelli's "Coronation of the Virgin," or "Madonna of the Magnificat," as it is also called. A resemblance may be observed between Botticelli and Mainardi, although the former developed much further this pleasing style, which he carried almost to affectation, and the unity of Botticelli's compositions is also much more perfect than the earlier Mainardi was able to attain.

Before leaving the Italian school, we must not forget to look at the delightful "Correggio," "Madonna



whom Browning made so famous, or infamous.

The name "Harpies" merely refers to the two little angels who support the base about which the picture is composed. Another "Madonna and Child," lent by the same patron, is attributed to Perugino, who was Raphael's teacher.

But the most interesting of Mr. Denys' collection is, no doubt, the "St. Michael and the Dragon," which, though attributed to Guido Reni, must be a copy and a very good one, too, of famous work in the old Church of the Capuchins in Rome, where the original, a considerably larger picture than ours, is the treasure of the Church. It is always covered by a curtain,

IN the circle, center, is The Madonna and Child, with St. John and an angel, after Sebastiano Mainardi, of the Florentine school of the sixteenth century.

The smaller oval is a portrait of himself by Rubens.

which is lifted only for devout pilgrims, who must also not forget to leave a coin with the barefooted Friar who acts as guide.

In this graceful composition, which belongs to the decline of the renaissance in Italy, the Angel St. Michael, whose duty it is to expel Satan and the rebellious angels from Heaven, is about to slay with his sword of light the horrid dragon, in whose face, by the way, so tradition says, the painter paid off an old grudge by depicting a disliked anti-Pope of the time.

### CARDINAL WAS IRATE.

This method of retaliation was by no means original with Guido, for legend has it that Michelangelo, when painting the famous "Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, settled a similar score with a disliked Cardinal by representing him in the picture as in

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